

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, July 31, 1876, with transcript

lipreading very important Brantford, Ontario. Monday, July 31st, 1876. Dear May,

Your note — dated the 26th — the wedding day — reached me yesterday and I am quite troubled to find that you have not yet received any of my letters.

When I started I entrusted a postal card with a V.S. postscript to a stranger at Framingham to post for you. Another postal card I posted myself — at some other station — of which I forget the name. On reaching Buffalo I posted a pencilled letter to you — and from Niagara I sent another — since which time I have sent you three other letters — and surely there has been time enough for some to reach you.

My poor dear May how neglectful I must have seemed to you. If I do not hear from you today that you have received some of mine — I shall send a telegram — that you may know I have not forgotten you.

I have just been looking over my treasures — your letters dear — and congratulating myself on the possession of such a faithful loving heart as yours. And so you wore my ring at night “for comfort” did you? — when you were tired out & homesick.

If it is any comfort to you why don't you wear it all the time? Moist hands will surely never hurt a pearl. Its natural element is the sea — It was born and brought up in the inside of an oyster shell! I don't think you need have any fear for the pearl itself - 2 so wear it when and where you will — and if you lose it — I shall search through Boston for its twin.

I trust you do not think this is a specimen of my best writing! I am epistolizing under difficulties — and the writing is only to be compared to yours when you write on the way to Nantucket !! Why was your pencilled postscript written under the above circumstances like

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the thunder of which you wrote to me? Now there's a conundrum for you — Answer if you can. — Because it was “joggly”!!

(I am sitting in a rustic summer house — made from a grape-vine! I am sitting upon a plank — and writing upon another. Over my head are the most tempting looking bunches of grapes — but — well — “the grapes are sour” — so I need not say much about them.)

A high wind makes it almost impossible to write — I have had one chase after my letter already! It is however so much more pleasant out here than indoors — that I am determined to brave the wind and write to you here.

I trust that Mr. Scudder has by this time quite recovered from his indisposition. I hope however that you won't let that prevent you from bathing if you wish to. It was very selfish in me to extract a promise from you in the matter. Bathe just when & how you like. I can surely trust you to take care of my pearl for me!

I would only remind you however that the sea is not its natural element — nor is an oyster-bed its proper 3 place of rest! — so be careful of it — for I value it above all other things — and let it be as bright and clear and beautiful when I come to claim it — as when I saw it last. Yes Mabel you are indeed my pearl — and a whole one too — and you must try to take care of yourself for my sake. It is well for me that Master Charlie has returned to Ingersoll. Were he here with his “model love-letter” to parade before my eyes — I should probably startle you with a stiff & stately letter commencing “Dear Miss Mabel” — and ending “Yours truly — A. Graham Bell” — though perhaps “truly yours” would be more to the point! However he has gone — and only the ghost of his ridicule hovers over me to deter me from saying to you just what I want.

(Do you know — I was nearly drowned this morning! — and in the most ridiculous sort of way too! That is I would have been drowned had I not swam ashore! I went down to the river to bathe with my Uncle Edward at seven o'clock this morning. Uncle Edward is my mother's brother, and bears an astonishing likeness to her. Well — we were swimming

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along famously — I — in front — Uncle a little behind — when I looked back — and was so overcome with a ludicrous idea that I could not swim for laughter! For there I saw my mother's face sticking up out of the water with a huge beard upon it! I laughed till the tears ran down my cheeks — I laughed till my head went under water — I laughed under 4 water and choked alternately — until a few vigorous strokes brought me to shore — where I lay laughing and coughing in the most “strangulary” sort of way — for there was the head — with its eyes wide open — staring in wonder at me from the water!

I wish you could see my Uncle Edward. He bears a good and noble character stamped upon his face. My mother and he are more like lovers than brother and sister — and they declare that the forty years that have passed since they last saw each other — appear like a day!

Their only trouble is the difficulty of communicating with one another. For some reason or other Mamma has a great difficulty in understanding his pronunciation — although to me it is perfectly distinct — and has no peculiarity about it whatever.

He speaks half the time, and then writes or uses the manual alphabet. No one else is under the necessity of doing so. I often use the manual alphabet with Mamma but only from convenience and not necessity. When I tell her for instance about you, It would be decidedly inconvenient were I to articulate so that every one else should hear what I say!

You cannot appreciate — as I do — what a blessing — the miracle of Lip-reading is — It seems to me a greater wonder every day. When I am with you dear, and speak to you freely by word of mouth — I often forget that 5 you cannot hear — I never do so with Mamma.

It seems so hard and so cruel that she should be shut in all by herself — when it is possible to acquire the art of Lip-reading. Before I saw you Mabel and before I went to Boston — I acquiesced in my mother's affliction — for to her it is an affliction — without murmuring — because I thought it irremediable — but now it pains me — For I know

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how much — faith & perseverance in regard to Lip-reading — could have done for her — How many sorrows and disheartenments might have been avoided — and how many opportunities for happy intercourse have been opened to her. It is my great grief — when I come home — to see her quiet resignation under “the will of God” — and to know how much might have been done for her and how little has been done. An obstinate dis-belief in the power of Lip-reading on the part of my father & myself — has cost my mother many needless sorrows. When I see her difficulty in understanding her brother — I can only sigh in sorrow — and say — like Maud Muller “It might have been”.)

A farmer is just passing at this moment and offers to post this letter in town — so I send it off just as it is — leaving unsaid all my news. Shall write again today — but think it best to send this as the mail closes at two o'clock.

With much love Alec.